

# What is your basis of response?

**Reference: SHM-S09-025-Mw-R00-P2**

(Originally spoken on 7 October 2012, edited on 8 October 2012)

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Let us turn to **John 7: 17-27**.

## **John 7: 17-27**

- 17 "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself.
- 18 "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.
- 19 "Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"
- 20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"
- 21 Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel.
- 22 "For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man.
- 23 "If a man receives circumcision on *the* Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?"
- 24 "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."
- 25 So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?"
- 26 "Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?"
- 27 "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from."

Today, I want to consider with you the life of the Lord Jesus in contrast to the people of the Jews. And as we ponder over the way they respond, it can help us in our own lives to ponder over how we ought to live our lives.

What is the basis of response on the part of the Jews and on the part of the Lord Jesus?

In this incident when we read in the context, we see that although the Jews were angry with the Lord Jesus for various reasons from time to time, in this context, we see that the Lord Jesus referred to the issue of His healing on the Sabbath.

He said, "If a man receives circumcision on *the* Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?" So the Jews were angry with the Lord Jesus because He healed on the Sabbath.

Why did the Lord Jesus heal on the Sabbath? Why were the Jews angry with Him? What is the basis of response? Why did they respond the way they did?

We can also ponder over why we respond to situations the way we do. What is the basis? What motivates us? What forms the reason why we choose a certain course of action?

In this context, we can say: Basically, the Jews as well as the Lord Jesus were responding in the context of keeping the laws of God.

The Jews were seeking to keep the laws of God. So too, the Lord Jesus was seeking to keep the laws of God. And yet, we find that the way they went about it was opposite. It led to hostility, conflict and the Jews being angry with the Lord Jesus, and angry enough to want to kill Him.

So let us consider the Jews. The Jews wanted to keep the Law of Moses, but what was their basis? How did they approach it?

From the context, we can see that basically, their approach in keeping the Law of Moses was not in accordance with God's intention, was not in accordance with the example of Moses, was not in accordance with the instructions that God had given through Moses.

They were seeking to keep the commandments of God, the Law of Moses, but they were concentrating on the outward forms, and they took pride in being disciples of Moses when in reality they were not following the example of Moses nor the instructions that he gave.

Why did they do that? Basically, we can see they sought to keep the Law of Moses in a manner which will lead to being accepted by others - they could call themselves people of the Law; they could call themselves disciples of Moses, worshippers of God.

We know the Pharisees also wanted to be regarded as teachers of the Law, worshippers of God, but the Lord Jesus was very angry with them because in reality, they were not worshippers of God, they were not truly teaching what God wanted them to teach.

The Jews sought to conduct themselves in such a way that they would be recognized, appreciated by others: They wanted to gain acceptance by others. We can say basically, it was the reward of men.

The Lord Jesus spoke about the Pharisees: Why did they pray openly for others to see? Why did they give alms in a way that others could recognize?

The Lord Jesus said: "They have received their reward". They received their reward from this world; they received their reward from the people of this world, but they would not receive the reward from God.

In contrast, we see the Lord Jesus sought to keep the laws of God: As the perfect Man, He was very careful to observe all that God had commanded. He sought to live by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God.

What was His approach?

He concentrated on the inward reality: in being good, in being what He ought to be. He knew that this was what God was really concerned about: the quality of His being. And because He concentrated on the right things, He would be rewarded by God even though men may persecute Him and kill Him.

And the Scriptures tell us that the Lord Jesus was obedient to God to the point of death, even death on a cross and God highly exalted Him. God gave Him a name that is above every name. God glorified the Lord Jesus, God rewarded Him because He kept the laws of God in the right way: He concentrated on the meaning and the intention of the laws that God had given, living by the moral law of perfection and the true will of God even though by so doing, He was misunderstood by men, resulting even in anger and hostility that could lead to death.

This is the contrast between the Jews – not all of them, but many of them – and the Lord Jesus.

And it is good for us to reflect on the basis upon which we make our choices, we respond to situations.

So, the underlying principle in this context can be summarized by the words the Lord Jesus said: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

We need to appreciate this principle, so that we can respond in the right way.

Let us look at **Mark 2: 23-28**.

**Mark 2: 23-28**

- 23 And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads *of grain*.
- 24 The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"
- 25 And He \*said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry;
- 26 how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar *the* high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for *anyone* to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?"
- 27 Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.
- 28 "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

This is another incident, in which the Jews were angry with the Lord Jesus and His disciples because of the issue of the Sabbath: He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads *of grain*. The Pharisees disapproved and they said to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" To them, picking the heads of grain was working on the Sabbath: "You are supposed to rest; you are not supposed to work. This is breaking the Law of God."

And the Lord Jesus told them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar *the* high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for *anyone* to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?"

This incident as it stands, might give us the impression that David and his companions broke the Law. They ate the consecrated bread which was not meant for others to eat generally. It was meant for the priest.

Why did the Lord Jesus give this example? Did not David break the Law?

The Lord Jesus quoted this to help us understand that when God gave us instructions, there is always a meaning, a purpose, an intention. Yes, as a general rule, the consecrated bread was meant for the priest, not for others; and if others were to violate this, then they would receive God's judgment. But in this instance, David and his companions were genuinely hungry and the bread was helpful to them in that situation. And in that context, God allowed them to partake of that bread.

Likewise, generally, the people were told not to labour on the Sabbath. But in this instance, the disciples were hungry and they picked the grains to eat. In terms of the meaning behind it, it was not a violation of God's intention. But because the Pharisees were concentrating on rules and regulations and outward forms of things, they regarded that as breaking the Law.

And so the Lord Jesus gave this very important principle for us to understand: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

God's concern is for man. God wants man to live a life that is meaningful, that is rich, that is good; and all the laws that God has given are meant to help us to live a rich and meaningful life.

God has not given us instructions to bind us, to make life difficult for us, to make it very tedious and painful and difficult. That is not God's intention. God wants us to live lives that are meaningful, where we can be truly happy, joyful, because they are good laws. His laws, His commandments are not burdensome. They are good; they are meaningful.

The Sabbath was made for the well-being of man. Why did God command the people to observe the Sabbath?

It was so that they would not overwork themselves: For every seven days, they would have a day of rest for their bodies, as well as for their animals, as well as for the fields. There was a rest that would help in recovery, in rejuvenation, in replenishment.

But more important than that, the Sabbath was meant to be a time for them to concentrate on their worship of God, to develop the quality of their being, to appreciate more of the spiritual, the eternal, the moral realm and not to become preoccupied with the things of this world, the daily work and situations that we encounter, the problems that confront us constantly.

We need to set aside time in order to concentrate on the spiritual, the eternal. It is meant for our well-being.

But it is not meant to become a legalistic law, whereby you keep the outward form of it but your heart is not truly with God. This is what happened to many of the Jews. They kept the outward forms – the sacrifices, the festivals – but their heart was far away from God.

So the Lord Jesus told the Pharisees: in vain they were worshipping God because they praised God with their lips but their hearts were far away from Him.

God is concerned about our heart, not just the outward things that we do or say. So when God made the Sabbath, as He did in many other instructions, it is meant to bring us good.

So we need to concentrate on the meaning behind it. The Lord Jesus healed on the Sabbath because it was good, it was meaningful: This man was in need and He helped him.

He said: "...are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath? I made an entire man well on the Sabbath for his well-being and you are angry with Me. Yet, you will circumcise a man on *the* Sabbath, so that the Law of Moses will not be broken. You are more concerned about these outward things, but when it comes to real love and compassion and doing what is really good and meaningful, you are not so concerned about that. You are more preoccupied with these outward forms of things." That is why He went on to say: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

What is the meaning of the things that we do? How do we approach life? How do we consider issues?

When we think about it this way – "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" – some of us may then think: "If that is the case, then keeping the Sabbath is not very important; I just need to say in my heart, 'I love God, I want to do His will', then whether I keep the Sabbath or not does not really matter. The Sabbath is made for man, for me to do as I wish, as I think."

Is that the meaning? Of course not!

Again, when we concentrate on the meaning, we will know that God has a meaning and purpose in the Sabbath and if we violate it, we will receive His judgment.

**Isaiah 58: 13-14**

- 13 "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure And speaking *your own* word,
- 14 Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."



This passage helps us to appreciate that while it is true the Sabbath was made for man, it does not mean that we can regard this lightly. It is a commandment of God. But we need to identify with Him: What is His purpose? What is His intention?

So this passage tells us very clearly that God gave them the Sabbath to help them to develop the quality of their worship of God, to develop the quality of their being.

And so He says: "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure And speaking *your own* word, Then you will take delight in the LORD".

The Lord expressed it in so many ways, in so many words in order to emphasize the importance of honouring God in keeping the Sabbath. We must keep the Sabbath in the right way; we must give it the right priority. God wants us to spend time to worship Him. Do we give it that priority? Are we concerned enough that when we gather for worship, we really come because we worship God, we honour Him? Or do we just take it lightly: "It is just another meeting"?

The way the Lord puts it should help us recognize He regards it as a very serious matter. But at the same time, we know that it is not meant to bind us; we are not meant to keep the Sabbath such that it does us harm. We are to keep it in such a way it does us good. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" but we cannot take that lightly because when God gives us instructions, He knows what He is doing.

But at the heart of it, we can see again and again, the issue has to do with the basis of our response. Why do we take it seriously? Why do we not take it seriously? It has to do with the quality of our worship of God; it has to do with what is important in our heart.

That is why He put it this way: "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure...". "...doing your *own* pleasure..." that means it has to do with the direction of our hearts. Are we concentrating on worshipping God, giving the priority to focus on Him, to hear what He has to say, or are we preoccupied with what we want – our own ideas, our own activities, our own ways of doing things – and we treat it lightly?

He says: "...on My holy day". It is "My holy day". Do we regard it in that way? Do we "call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And honor it"? What is the attitude that we have? "...desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure And speaking *your own* word" – it is a contrast between focus on ourselves or focus on the Lord. Do we take delight in Him?

If we do that, He says: "I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." God wants to bless us. He wants to give us the very best, but He cannot do that if our hearts are not with Him. If our values are not right, God cannot bless us even though He wants to. And so, it is very important for us to think about this.

The principle of the Sabbath being made for man and not man for the Sabbath should be applied at all times in our lives, in everything that we do. It tells us that God is more concerned about our heart – the reality, the meaning – and not just the outward things that we do.

It is right and it is good for us constantly to be thankful to God for all that He has done for us. We are grateful to Him and to express that gratitude is good. And in our time of worship, we can heartily express our gratitude to God.

But it is also very important for us, even as we express our gratitude to God to consider: Is our focus ourselves or God?

When we are thankful for what God has done for us, are we preoccupied with ourselves – “God has done this for me; He has done that for me” – or do we think: “What would bring true joy to God? What can we do that will bring gladness, satisfaction, happiness in His heart? Can we do something that will really make Him very happy?”

Do we think about that or are we preoccupied with asking God to give us this and that, and then being thankful? We must go beyond that so that our lives would truly be offered up to Him: We give ourselves up to Him and our bodies a living sacrifice to do the things that are important to Him, that are meaningful to Him.

Are we doing the things that we do because we want to gain acceptance, we want the approval of man, or we want the approval of God?

Do we want the reward of this world, or do we want to see the smile on the face of the Lord, that He could heartily say: “Well done, good and faithful slave”?

This is the issue that we have to consider.

The way the Jews responded: their basis was what they wanted for themselves – glory from men, glory for themselves, approval by men, reward from men.

But the Lord Jesus’ concentration was not that. He was rejected by men. He was forsaken by men. And for the sake of mankind, He was even forsaken by God. Because of the sins of men, He gave up everything. Why? – Because of love, because of the quality of His heart.

And in so doing, He truly fulfilled the laws of God, the commandments of God – the highest level of quality.

So when we thank God for what He has done for us, it is good for us constantly to reflect: Are we conscious of wanting to bring joy to the Lord?

Can we live our lives such that when the Lord looks at us, He will be very satisfied: “This is a meaningful life”? God is very happy when He sees us with the right spirit, when He sees that we have a right basis for our response.

So, it is good for us, as we thank the Lord for what He has done for us on the cross, as we thank Him for saving us, as we thank Him for taking care of us each day that we ponder over what would bring joy to Him.

It is certainly very important that we should always be thankful to Him. We should not forget all that He has done for us – even small things, we should always be thankful to Him.

But let us, in that spirit of gratitude and thankfulness, spend time to ponder: How can we live our lives such that the Lord Himself will be joyful, will find satisfaction as He looks at us?

So then, let us come before the Lord and ask Him to help us ponder over these issues, to consider what would be a life that will bring joy to Him.

And let us ask Him to help us to be true to Him as He has been true to us. He has sought our well-being and He has done everything He could for us. Will we seek to live for Him who died for us and rose again?

God wants us to learn to live for Him because when we do that there will grow in us an ever deepening quality in our being: The more we learn to give ourselves to God, the better a person we will become because the quality of our love will become purer and purer, and that will ultimately be the greatest good for us.

So let us come before the Lord and express to Him our gratitude to Him and ask Him to search our hearts, so that if there is any aspect in our life that is not what it ought to be, we will confess to Him, seek His forgiveness and ask Him to help us to live as we should.

If we have been living in the right direction, choosing the right path, let us ask Him to help us to be steadfast, unwavering, to persevere to the end the path of His calling, that we will grow deeper and deeper in this way of living.